



A strong brand

6 benefits of a strong brand...

...and the 4Cs of brand management

Branding – can it really work for the small business?

If you think of a brand, what comes to mind? CocaCola, Virgin, Hertz, Orange? It's easy to think of branding as being for the big boys with big bucks. But that's not to say that only large corporates can play the branding game.

Small companies really should be able to build strong brands too. They have every reason to be close to their market, to understand it well and to build the relationship that's at the heart of every brand. But all too often, smaller businesses fail to take advantage of the opportunities that branding offers because of preconceptions about what branding really is.

1. **A brand is just another word for a logo – and I've got one of those**

Your brand is far more than your logo, then – it is about the **values** of, and your **vision** for, your business; it is the **personality** of your business and the **promise** that it makes to your customers.

Your brand values will define what your business stands for and will inform your decision making on many levels, from recruiting staff with the right attitude and approach to choosing the promotional methods that you use. Your brand reflects the way your business behaves and the way it portrays itself; your logo is just one of the ways your business makes itself visible.

2. **Branding is just a bit fluffy, there's no real substance to it**

It's true that brands appeal to the emotions and that everyone will have an instant emotional reaction to your brand but that's because the human brain is wired to react that way – and there's nothing 'fluffy' about that. Anyone who ignores the impact of that instant reaction is missing the opportunity to connect with their customers at an instinctive level.

3. **Brands are only for consumer products, they're not relevant to my service business**

Traditionally, brands *are* associated with consumer products but increasingly service providers are understanding the benefits of branding. With a product you have tangible benefits to sell but with a service there is nothing to see, taste or touch. Your customers can only make a judgement about your service *after* they have agreed to buy, which means you have to build a level of trust and confidence and this is much easier with a strong brand based on these values.

Six big benefits of branding

So how does a business brand work?

1. It acts as an influence of choice

By pressing the emotional buttons that appeal to your target customers, a strong, recognisable brand will act as a 'short cut' in their decision making process. Instead of dithering over alternatives or meticulously comparing options where there is no clear point of difference, your customers can instantly select your brand – because they know what it stands for.

2. It creates loyalty and advocacy

Brands go beyond making promises tangible benefits. Important as these are in your marketing, a brand will go one step further to create an emotional bond. Visit www.lovemarks.com to see just how enthusiastic people can become about their favourite brands. And then imagine them talking with such passion about yours.

3. It enables you to command a price premium

One long-established truism in marketing is that, in any market, only one operator can be the cheapest. Every other market player must find a way to differentiate themselves from the rest. A strong brand will help achieve this and do so in ways that will encourage your customers to pay for the intangible benefits they get from associating themselves with a brand that makes them appear cool, fashionable or clever.

4. It provides a vital differentiator, especially where the basic product or service is widely offered.

Finding and maintaining your point of difference from your competition is not easy, particularly if your focus solely on tangible benefits that can be easily copied. The fact that a brand is based on emotional, intangible benefits *does* mean you need to take care in managing the brand, but it also means that those facets of your business are much harder for your competitors to replicate.

5. It provides a platform for growth

A strong brand will act as a launch pad whenever you expand your business operations. Recognition of what a brand stands for can be transferred to new products and new markets much more easily than starting from scratch with each new development.

6. It provides a framework to integrate all the ways you present your business

So many companies suffer from 'brand creep' – every time they produce a new brochure, order some new business cards, or create a PowerPoint presentation, their logo stretches slightly, the colours alter a little, and the imagery they use becomes that bit more out of kilter. Before they know it, all semblance of consistency has disappeared. A clear and policy will prevent these problems and enable you to present a consistent face to the world.

The three Cs of branding

A brand has to be nurtured. It takes time, thought and consistent application. But it does not have to take big budgets. It is a mindset that requires both discipline and passion. It's about caring for the big picture and the small detail. When managing your brand, keep the three Cs at the front of your mind.

Credibility

A brand has been described as "everything you say and everything you do." A credible brand will always align the way a business behaves with the way it is portrayed. This close connection will ensure that your customer's instinctive reaction is one of trust and belief in your brand not one of doubt and uncertainty.

Clarity

A strong brand is based on clearly defined values, that are important to your customers and that differentiate you from your competitors. A clear understanding of these values throughout your business will ensure that they are communicated clearly through "everything you say and everything you do."

Consistency

The value of a brand comes through recognition and recognition comes from consistent application of every visible manifestation of your brand, at every 'touch point' that your customers experience.

Clarity Marketing Ltd. provides brand strategy services to small and medium sized businesses. If you would like some help developing and managing your brand, contact us on 0115 964 8222 or enquiries@clarity-in-communication.com.